

AN ETHICAL VIEW OF AMERICAN POLITICS.

Political Mistakes.

NO. III.

One of the strongest of human instincts is that of gain, and when gains are made, be they large or small, we at once strive for still greater gains. This may be called selfishness or what not; but it is nevertheless a fact that this one instinct is the foundation of all great achievements in the history of the world. We can detect it running through all ancient and mediæval history, and in modern times it invades the realm of philosophy, literature, science and business or trade, for is not the whole civilized world actuated more or less by what is termed the "commercial spirit?"

The familiar story of how Jay Gould started out in life with the resolution to stop when his wealth should reach the sum of \$50,000; but when that point was attained he placed his figure at \$250,000, and so on, is but an illustration of the spirit that inspires all of us to seek to obtain more of whatever may be our aim in life, than what we already have, be that much or little.

This instinct is as noticeable in the domain of politics as elsewhere. No politician is so great that he does not strive for still more greatness; no one ever achieves so high an office that he does not strive for a still higher—or the same one over again. When it is taken into consideration that the majority of our politicians will strive and scheme, by methods various and unique to advance their own or party welfare, it is perhaps a source of congratulation that the American people are divided into political parties, for if it were not so, if we all could follow the same party standard, the instinct of self aggrandizement released from neutralizing influences would find vent in other ways certain to be hurtful to the best interests of the people in the end.

It seems to be a law of nature that we should divide politically as well as religiously; we form a positive and negative division, analogous to the positive and negative forces of matter known to the physicist. The moral, as well as the physical world, is held in a state of equilibrium only by the equality of opposing forces.

We are natural partisans on every question, prone to make a decision very quickly—and having once decided, our efforts are directed to the support of that decision as a matter of personal pride, possibly rather than to the ascertainment of the real facts with the purpose of reversing the decision if necessary or desirable. No proposition can be found not axiomatic, upon which all men can agree, even all men of intelligence. Knowing that we are prone to differ, environment is the next most interesting factor in the formation and development of our opinions upon almost any subject. Extensive travel and a broadened sphere of honest observation will inevitably lead to more liberal views, while the man who has never traveled far from home and who confines his reading within narrow bounds will necessarily hold narrow, contracted or prejudiced views, upon any question of public interest that may arise. It certainly behooves us to reason with our neighbors, not against them, if they do not think as we do; we can never hope to accomplish anything by abusing them or their interests.

The greatest schism of American politics was due to the slavery question in one form or another. It is a matter of history, that the colonists, at the close of the revolution, looked forward to the ultimate emancipation of the slaves, and that many of the leading slave-holders of the south did actually free their own slaves.

The climatic conditions, the dependence upon cotton as the great staple and a dearth of currency, all favored slave labor in the southern states, while in the north, a more rigorous climate, a diversity of crops and the dawn of the modern industrialism in the earlier days of the republic induced the colonies themselves to throw off the yoke of slavery.

Then came the strife for commercial ascendancy between the north and the south, between free labor and slave labor. The industrialism of the north grew apace, while the political ascendancy of the slaveholding states was maintained only by the acquisition of new territory and other political expedients not necessary to mention. Pro-slavery contention became so sharp and determined that its advocates came to regard it as a "divine institution."

It is perhaps too much to say that the southern leaders should have foreseen the inevitable, and should have consented to, or proposed some plan looking to the final extinction of the "institution" of slavery; but had some such course been possible, it would have

been far less expensive in money to say nothing of human lives, even if the national government had purchased the slaves, than the bloody civil war precipitated by the south immediately upon losing political supremacy in the nation's councils, although no scheme of forcible emancipation was proposed by competent authority, could have been carried or effected at that time.

Had the southern leaders possessed sufficient wisdom or foresight to have adopted or even to have shown a willingness to acquiesce in any plan looking to the restriction and ultimate extinction of slavery, the civil war could hardly have occurred, and the south would have been richer in the men and property blotted out by that great conflict, and what is almost as important, there would be less so-called sectionalism in politics today.

The war came, however, and now that the time usually allotted to a generation has nearly passed away since its close, it seems pertinent to inquire for other reasons for the continued existence of this sectional spirit in all its acerbity. The close of the war found an illiterate negro population in the southern states nearly equal to that of the whites, and the war party or republican leaders of the north as a party measure, and in the hope of securing political control of at least some of the southern states then in process of "reconstruction," succeeded in conferring the right of suffrage upon the freedmen without restriction.

This was a conspicuous instance of sectional legislation, and its effect can be seen in the race disturbances and the solid array of all white voters under the democratic standard in the south. Mississippi has an educational qualification, and thus secures the political supremacy of the whites; but the only hope in the other states is for white people to stand together.

This and some other republican measures intended to coerce the south have all failed in the real result intended—so did the war as a southern measure; but, if the party leaders had shown more wisdom and less selfishness or greed for gain, and been willing to legislate in the interest of the people of the south, instead of against them, it is probable that that "intolerant southern feeling" so called, would have nearly disappeared ere this, and our political alignment would have been upon other than a sectional basis. NIXON.

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